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LETTER DATED 26 MARCH 1997 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to convey the attached communication, dated 24 March 1997, which I have received from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I would appreciate your bringing it to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN

97-08495 (E) 270397

Annex

Letter dated 24 March 1997 from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with Security Council resolution 1088 (1996), I attach the third monthly report on Stabilization Force (SFOR) operations. I would appreciate your making this report available to the Security Council.

The report describes recent violence associated with the attempted return of refugees and displaced persons in the zone of separation, particularly in Gajevi. This is a disturbing development that must not be allowed to continue. SFOR will play its role in providing general area security, but this is not enough. The international community must put political pressure on the parties to ensure that they fulfil their obligations under the Peace Agreement with respect to returns. In addition, there is a need for a comprehensive strategy for returns that is coordinated with economic reconstruction and informed by the security advice of SFOR and the International Police Task Force (IPTF). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will play an important role in this regard.

Finally, the local police must be retrained, restructured and made to carry out their responsibilities for local law and order. A strengthened IPTF is an essential first step in this regard, and I fully back your request to the Security Council for an increase in the authorized strength of the force. A second key element is the effective implementation of the extensive training and resources programme established by the conference that you chaired in Dublin last September. I would hope that a way could be found to focus the attention of the international community on the urgent need to provide the necessary resources.

(Signed) Javier SOLANA

Appendix

Monthly report to the United Nations Security Council on SFOR operations

SFOR operations

1. Approximately 31,000 SFOR troops are currently deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with contributions from all the NATO nations and, with Slovenia joining SFOR on 24 February 1997, from 19 non-NATO countries. Concepts are now in place for the use and exercising of operational reserves from within the theatre and strategic reserves from outside the theatre in order to give the force enhanced flexibility and to reinforce its deterrent role.

2. Over the past month, SFOR has continued to conduct area reconnaissance and surveillance through ground and air patrols across the region, and to make random inspections of cantonment sites. Increased patrolling has taken place in Mostar in the wake of last month's violence there, and SFOR, in cooperation with the International Police Task Force (IPTF), has removed a number of illegal checkpoints in the city. Patrolling was also increased in a number of villages in and around the zone of separation as a result of recent violations by the parties of the procedure established for the return of refugees.

Cooperation and compliance by the parties

3. The parties are assessed as continuing to be in general compliance with the military provisions of the Peace Agreement. However, as noted above, there has again been violence associated with the attempted return of refugees in the zone of separation, and all parties appear ready to use coercion to shift the ethnic balance in "their" areas, or to deter minority return.

4. Since 21 February, SFOR troops conducted over 500 compliance inspections and monitored over 150 authorized movement and training activities and over 70 demining activities by the parties.

5. The first phase of the temporary suspension of the SFOR confiscation policy for previously undeclared arms (para. 4 of last month's report refers (see S/1997/193)) came to an end on 15 February. The next step, which lasted until 15 March, was the approval process for the final storage sites for the weapons and ammunition. The last step, which required extension until 15 April, is the organized movement and monitoring of the weapons and ammunition. The total number surrendered is still being verified by SFOR, but the parties have declared a wide range of weapons, including tanks, grenades, ammunition, small arms and mines.

6. Prior to the Brcko arbitration decision on 14 February, SFOR imposed a temporary ban on training and movement activities conducted by the parties' military units. This ban was lifted on 10 March, although the parties still have to apply for permission to move and train their units. SFOR will examine each request individually before granting permission. Similarly, the ban on the call-up of reservists, which was also imposed by SFOR in the lead-up to the

Brcko decision, has now been lifted, although any party wishing to call up reserves must forward its request to SFOR three weeks in advance.

7. With respect to freedom of return, there were serious disturbances over the reporting period associated with the return of refugees to the village of Gajevi, in the zone of separation near Celic. These disturbances were apparently triggered by the arrest of a Bosniac by the Bosnian Serb police on 26 February. On 26 February, four Bosniac prefabricated houses in Gajevi were completely demolished by a series of explosions. Later that same day, 3 Bosnian Serbs were kidnapped and beaten by 15 armed Bosniacs, in apparent retaliation for the arrest of the Bosniac. In the early hours of 1 March the three were released and were taken to the SFOR position just outside Celic.

8. On 2 March, a group of about 150 Bosnian Serbs then moved into Gajevi from the nearby area of Koraj and set fire to nine prefabricated Bosniac houses in the village. SFOR troops linked arms and blocked the crowd from destroying the two remaining prefabricated houses. Bosnian Serb police subsequently arrived on the scene, too late to prevent the destruction. Tensions escalated still further on 3 March when approximately 50 Bosniacs gathered at the west end of the Gajevi bridge and prevented a small group of SFOR troops from crossing, demanding their return to their headquarters. Subsequently, the SFOR troops, with IPTF assistance, succeeded in dispersing the crowd without further trouble.

9. On 4 March, additional SFOR troops moved into the area, setting up a security cordon and imposing a temporary restricted zone around Celic, Koraj and Gajevi. All resettlement and construction activity in Gajevi was prohibited for seven days. However, at the end of that period, on 11 March, the last remaining Bosniac homes in Gajevi were set afire and destroyed by a crowd of around 30 Bosnian Serbs. IPTF has now begun an investigation into the events in Gajevi.

10. In a further development with respect to freedom of return, the Bosnian Serbs announced in early March that Bosniac returnees in the Sapna Thumb area, near Zvornik, would be required to carry Bosnian Serb identity cards. The Bosnian Serb police began issuing the identity cards to Bosniacs living in the towns of Jusici, Dugi Dio and Mahala, and the Zvornik police chief was ordered to evict any resident not in possession of the card by 10 March. Although this procedure is in line with agreed zone of separation resettlement procedures, Bosniac returnees to villages along the zone of separation have insisted in the past on retaining their original identification cards. Aware of the potential for further tension, observers from SFOR and IPTF supervised the Bosnian Serbs' delivery of the cards and persuaded Serb officials to give the Bosniacs more time to get the proper identification. Federation identification cards surrendered to the Bosnian Serb police will be handed over to IPTF for final disposal.

11. In Mostar, the situation remains tense but calm in the wake of last month's violent confrontations between Bosniacs and Bosnian Croats. Following the violence, SFOR's presence in the city was strengthened, patrolling was increased and checkpoints were introduced. SFOR continues to work closely with IPTF in the city and on 9 March, nine illegal police checkpoints (eight Bosnian Croat and one Bosniac) were discovered and subsequently dismantled.

12. The Parties have made some progress with respect to demining, and have complied with the decisions taken at the mid-January meeting of the Joint Military Commission, defining targets for demining activity. Since 21 February, over 70 demining activities were monitored by SFOR.

Cooperation with international organizations

13. SFOR continues to provide support within its capabilities to the international civil organizations in theatre. As noted above, there is close daily coordination with IPTF. In addition, following the violence in Mostar, it was agreed that senior officials from SFOR, the Office of the High Representative and IPTF should meet daily in Sarajevo as a "Mostar Security Coordination Group". It was also agreed that there should be a joint 24-hour command post at the office of the High Representative in Mostar. Building on existing operational liaison and communications arrangements, these initiatives have strengthened coordination and improved responsiveness.

14. SFOR will establish a close working relationship with the new Deputy High Representative for Brcko appointed at the Brcko Implementation Conference in Vienna on 7 March. SFOR will also coordinate closely with the enhanced IPTF presence in Brcko and will work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other organizations involved in order to implement procedures for the phased and orderly return of refugees and displaced persons.

15. SFOR continues to cooperate closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in its preparations for the municipal elections, which have now been moved to September 1997. SFOR will continue to support OSCE in its role of ensuring compliance by the parties with the corresponding commitments under the Peace Agreement. The temporary suspension of SFOR's weapons confiscation policy (referred to in para. 5 above) resulted in the declaration by the parties of a number of weapons which fall under the responsibility of OSCE. Once the figures involved have been fully verified, they will be provided separately by SFOR to the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.